



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PIETRELCINA AND TO SAN GIOVANNI ROTONDO,
ON THE 50th ANNIVERSARY OF THE SAINT'S DEATH

EUCCHARISTIC CONCELEBRATION

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS

*Square of the Church "San Pio da Pietrelcina" (San Giovanni Rotondo)
Saturday, 17 March 2018*

[Multimedia]

From the biblical Readings we have heard, I would like to expand on three words: prayer, smallness, wisdom.

Prayer. Today's Gospel Reading presents to us Jesus who prays. From his heart these words flow: "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth..." (Mt 11:25). Praying for Jesus was spontaneous; it was not optional: he would frequently go to lonely places to pray (cf. Mk 1:35); dialogue with the Father came *first*. In this way the disciples naturally saw the importance of prayer, and so one day they asked him: "Lord, teach us to pray" (Lk 11:1). If we wish to imitate Jesus, let us too begin from where he started, that is, from prayer.

We can ask ourselves: do we Christians pray enough? Often, when it is time for prayer, many excuses come to mind, many urgent things to do.... At times, then, we set prayer aside because we are caught up in an activism that becomes inconclusive when we forget that "one thing is needful" (Lk 10:42), when one forgets that without him we cannot do anything (cf. Jn 15:5), and in this way we abandon prayer. Saint Pio, 50 years since his departure to Heaven, helps us, because he wished to leave us the legacy of prayer. He would recommend: "Pray a lot, my children, pray always, never tiring" (*Words to the Second International Congress of Prayer Groups*, 5 May 1966).

Jesus in the Gospel also shows us *how* to pray. First of all he says: “I praise you, Father”. He does not begin by saying, “I need this and that”, but says, “I thank you”. One does not know the Father without opening oneself to praise, without devoting time to Him alone, without adoration. How often have we forgotten the prayer of adoration, the prayer of praise! We must recover this. Each one can ask him or herself: how do I worship? When do I worship? When do I praise God? Recover the prayer of adoration and praise. It is the personal contact, face to face, staying in silence before the Lord, the secret to entering ever more into communion with him. A prayer may start as a request, even a hasty one but it matures in adoration and prayer. Mature prayer. Then it becomes truly personal, as for Jesus, who then engages freely in dialogue with the Father: “Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will” (Mt 11:26). And then, in free and trustful dialogue, prayer takes on the burden of life and places it before God.

And then we ask ourselves: do our prayers resemble Jesus’, or are they reduced to occasional emergency calls? “I need this”, and so I start to pray straight away. And when you do not need it, what do you do? Or do we consider them as tranquilizers to take in regular doses, to have a little relief from stress? No, prayer is an act of love, of staying with God and laying the life of the world before him: it is an indispensable work of spiritual mercy. Thus, if we do not entrust our brothers and sisters, situations, to the Lord, who will? Who will intercede, who will take care to knock on God’s heart to open the door of mercy to humanity in need? For this, Padre Pio left us prayer groups. He said to them, “It is prayer, the united force of all good souls, that moves the world, that renews consciences ... that heals the sick, that sanctifies work, that elevates healthcare, that gives moral strength ... that spreads God’s smile and blessing on every languor and weakness (*ibid*). Let us safeguard these words, and ask ourselves again: do I pray? And when I pray, do I know how to praise, do I know how to worship, do I know how to take my life, and that of all people, to God?

Second word: *smallness*. In the Gospel, Jesus praises the Father because he revealed the mysteries of his Kingdom to the little ones. Who are these little ones, who know how to welcome God’s secrets? The little ones are those who are in need of the great, who are not self-sufficient, who do not think that they can rely on themselves alone. The little are those who have a humble and open heart, poor and needy, who are aware of the need to pray, to entrust themselves and to let themselves be accompanied. The heart of these little ones is like an antenna: it receives God’s signal, immediately; they notice it immediately. Because God seeks contact with all, but those who make themselves great create enormous disturbance, and God’s intention does not arrive when one is full of oneself, there is no room for God. This is why He prefers the little ones; he reveals himself to them, and the way to encounter him is by abasing oneself, becoming inwardly smaller, acknowledging oneself as in need. The mystery of Jesus Christ is a mystery of smallness: he abased himself; he annihilated himself. The mystery of Jesus, as we see in the Host at every Mass, is a mystery of smallness, of humble love, and it can be grasped only by becoming small and attending to the little ones.

And now we can ask ourselves: do we know how to seek God where he dwells? Here there is a special Shrine where he is present, because there are many little ones chosen by him. Saint Pio called it “a temple of prayer and science”, where all are called to be “reserves of love” for others (*Address for the First Anniversary of the Inauguration*, 5 May 1957): it is the *Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza* (*House for the Relief of Suffering*). In the sick, one finds Jesus, and in the loving care of those tending to the wounds of one’s neighbour there is the path to encounter Jesus. Those who care for the little ones are on God’s side and defeat the throwaway culture, which on the contrary, prefers the powerful and considers the poor useless. Those who prefer the little ones proclaim a prophecy of life against the prophets of doom of every age, even today, [against] those who discard people, discard children, the elderly, because they are not useful. As a child, at school, they taught us the history of the Spartans. I was always struck by what the teacher told us, that when a deformed baby was born, they would carry him or her to the top of a mountain and throw [the child] down, so that these little ones would not live. We children would say: “But what cruelty!”. Brothers and sisters, we do the same, with more cruelty, with more science. What is not needed, what is not productive must be discarded. This is the throwaway culture: the little ones are not wanted today. And this is why Jesus is set aside.

Finally the third word. In the first Reading God says: “Let not a wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might” (Jer 9:23). True wisdom does not lie in having great qualities, nor does true strength lie in power. Those who show themselves to be strong are not wise and those who respond to evil with evil are not strong. The only wise and invincible weapon is charity inspired by faith, because it has the power to disarm the forces of evil. Saint Pio fought evil throughout his life and fought it wisely, like the Lord: with humility, with obedience, with the Cross, offering up suffering for love. And everyone admired him; but few do the same. Many speak well, but how many follow his example? Many are willing to put a “like” on the page of the great saints, but who acts like them? Because the Christian life is not a “like”; it is “my offering”. Life is scented when it is offered as a gift; it is tasteless when it is kept to oneself.

And in the First Reading, God also explains from where to draw the wisdom of life: “Let the one who glories glory in this: that he understands and knows me” (Jer 9:23). To know him, that is to meet him, as God who saves and forgives: this is the way of wisdom. In the Gospel Jesus reaffirms: “Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden” (Mt 11:28). Who among us can feel excluded from the invitation? Who can say, “I do not need it”? Saint Pio offered his life and untold suffering to enable his brothers and sisters to encounter the Lord. And the decisive way of encountering him was through Confession, the Sacrament of Reconciliation. There, a wise life begins and starts afresh, loved and forgiven; there begins the healing of the heart. Padre Pio was an *apostle of the confessional*. Today too he invites us there; and he says to us: “Where are you going? To Jesus or to your sadness? What are you going back to? To the One who saves you or, to your despondency, your regrets, your sins? Come, come, the Lord is awaiting you. Take courage, no reason is so grave as to exclude you from his mercy”.

The prayer groups, the sick of the *Casa Sollievo*, the confessional: three visible signs that remind us of three valuable legacies: prayer, smallness and the wisdom of life. Let us ask for the grace to cultivate them every day.